

VZCZCXRO4854
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #1964/01 3031405
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 301405Z OCT 09
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6500
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001964

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA; PRM FOR FRONT OFFICE AND
PRM/ANE; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: USUN AMBASSADOR RICE VISITS WEST BANK REFUGEE
CAMP, IT COMPANY, AND JOB CREATION SITE

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On October 22, USUN Ambassador Susan Rice visited UNRWA facilities in Jalazone refugee camp and visited a Palestinian information technology company and a USAID emergency job program site. UNRWA staff and Palestinians interlocutors alike commented that while some improvements have been made in the West Bank, they are limited and have not reached the majority of people due to remaining access restrictions. End Summary.

Visit to Jalazone Refugee Camp

¶2. (SBU) On October 22, Ambassador Susan Rice visited Jalazone refugee camp in the West Bank, where she met with UNRWA Commissioner General Karen AbuZayd and UNRWA Director for West Bank Operations Barbara Shenstone. In the West Bank, Shenstone said, UNRWA provides health, education, and relief services to roughly 770,000 refugees, representing 1/3 of the population. Of the total, 189,000 refugees live inside 19 camps, four of which lie in Area C. Shenstone noted that UNRWA does not control infrastructure development in the camps and, therefore, the camps were built without planning or oversight. She said that the West Bank refugee camps have suffered from the absence of law and order, high unemployment, a large youth population, and little local economic activity. As a result, the camps tend to be "hotspots of poverty and political rebellion," she added. Shenstone noted that, despite its location in Area C, Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces are permitted to patrol in Jalazone Camp due to its proximity to Ramallah.

¶3. (SBU) UNRWA provides education for grades 1-9 in 97 schools across the West Bank. Shenstone reported that the Jalazone Camp Girls' School is the last school that remains double-shift, i.e., two schools are operating in one physical building. This is due in part to the difficulty in obtaining building permits in Area C from the GOI and in part to the school's proximity to the Beit El settlement. In response to Ambassador Rice's question regarding girls' academic achievement, Shenstone noted that in the West Bank, 70-80 percent of children complete secondary school; of these children, there are roughly even numbers of girls and boys. Commissioner General AbuZayd noted that UNRWA uses host government curricula (the PA curriculum in the West Bank) and, since 2002, has integrated an extra-curricular Human Rights and Tolerance Education program in all of its schools in the region. Shenstone further pointed out that UNRWA operates three vocational training centers in the West Bank, one of which is dedicated for pre-service teacher training, and one hospital in Qalqilya.

¶4. (SBU) In addition to its regular services, UNRWA has provided emergency assistance since 2000 to refugees in the West Bank, largely in the form of food assistance, job creation, and additional health services, such as mobile health clinics to reach isolated communities. Shenstone

noted that in the past three years, UNRWA has increased its attention to refugee protection programs addressing problems arising out of access and movement restrictions. While refugees represent the most vulnerable people in the West Bank, the refugees living near the separation barrier and in Area C live in the poorest conditions, she said.

Improvements on the Ground Are Limited

15. (SBU) When asked about recent economic trends, Shenstone replied that there are "bubbles of improvement," particularly around Ramallah, but nothing on a broad scale. The potential for growth is there, she added, but the closure regime must be lifted, particularly on imports/exports into Israel and Jordan and the movement of goods between the northern and southern West Bank. UNRWA Area Officer Youssef Hushiyeh agreed that he has seen some signs of improvement, but no fundamental change in the economy.

Exalt Technologies: Growth Potential, Movement/Access Problems Remain

16. (SBU) In a meeting with Palestinian software development company Exalt Technologies, CEO Tareq Maayah stressed the importance of shifting the Palestinian economy from its traditionalist roots to the information and communication technology sector to take advantage of an educated work force and proximity to foreign markets. Currently, only a small percentage of the 2,000 yearly West Bank ICT graduates are able to find well-paying jobs, he said. Maayah added that

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the ICT sector needs foreign direct investment to jump-start the industry, noting that the upcoming Expotech conference and trade show included representatives from Microsoft, Google, Cisco, and HP.

17. (SBU) Maayah highlighted difficulties, however, in access and movement. ICT companies continue to face delays and obstruction in importing equipment, much of which requires a special permit from the GOI. Maayah noted that his company is partnered with Cisco's subsidiary in Israel, but that his staff face difficulties in traveling to and from the Israeli partner's offices. One staff member noted that "humiliation is constant, even with a permit. We used to travel the same roads as the settlers; now they divide us and make us travel crazy, long routes."

USAID Job Creation Site in Birzeit

18. (SBU) Ambassador Rice visited Birzeit village north of Ramallah, where USAID is funding a job creation program that is providing employment to residents and renovating the old city of Birzeit. The project aims to rehabilitate some older homes, including one as the first guest house in the village, and to repave the streets with Jerusalem stone.

19. (U) USUN New York cleared this cable.
RUBINSTEIN